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THE NATIONAL ERA.

WASHINGTON, DECEMBER 18, 1848.

For the National Era.

SKETCHES OF

MODERN REFORMS AND REFORMERS.

IN GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND.

No. 17.—History of Catholic Emancipation—The

Catholic Committee—The Catholic Board—The

Catholic Association of 1823—Its Power—The

How and the Mon—Daniel O'Connell elected for

Clare—Alarm in Downing Street—The Duke of

Wellington's Decision—Passage of the Emancipation

Bill—Services of O'Connell and Richard Lalor

Shiel—The letter as an Orator.

In giving a brief history of the greatest measure

of religious toleration in our times, the

EMANCIPATION OF THE CATHOLICS OF GREAT BRITAIN

AND IRELAND, I shall barely glance at the early

efforts of its friends.

Notwithstanding important amendments were made

in the Catholic Penal Code, in 1779 and

1793, the remaining disabilities and penalties hung

over Ireland like a dark cloud, shutting out the

sun of civil and religious freedom. In the latter

year, an association, called the "Catholic Com-

mittee," was organized in Dublin, to agitate and

petition for repeal. Though its efforts were

unsuccessful, and it was ultimately rent in pieces by

internal divisions, it was the germ of all future

organizations having the same objects. In 1810, the

"Catholic Board," having in view a like re-

sult by similar means, was formed out of the

fragments of the Committee. It soon divided into

two parties—one contending for unqualified

Emancipation; the other being willing to concede

to the King a veto on the appointment of Catho-

lic bishops in Ireland. The former party was led

by Daniel O'Connell; the latter by Richard

Lalor Shiel. Four years of controversy among

themselves, and collision with the Government,

led to the dissolution of the Board, by act of Par-

liament, in 1814. During the succeeding nine

years, the agitation for repeal was frequently re-

newed; and the contest was characterized by

great violence among the politicians in Dublin,

and occasional riots and commotions throughout

the provinces. Mr. O'Connell being the moral

spirit of the Emancipators. In the years 1822-'3,

Ireland seemed verging towards revolution. The

remedies which the British Government prescribed

for her political and religious diseases were

insurrection acts, coercion, suspensions of the

habeas corpus, capital trials, hangings, and trans-

portation, administered by the batons of the police

and the bayonets of the soldiery. During these

nine years of discontent, violence, and blood, a

few friends in the House of Commons remained

true to Ireland, almost every session compelling

a division on the question of Catholic Emancipa-

tion.

The year 1823 saw a bright star of promise

arise on the dark and troubled horizon of Hiber-

nia. The exigencies of the times had healed the

feuds of hostile factions among the Emancipation-

ists, and they closed hands in defence of their

common liberties. In May, of that year, O'Con-

nell and Shiel, who had long been estranged from

each other, accidentally met among the mountains

of Wicklow, at the house of a friend. A reconcilia-

tion took place, and they resolved to form a

administration. After the repeal of the Corpora-

tion and Test Acts the next year, a struggle for

partial relief to the Catholics, which resulted suc-

cessfully in the Commons, but was defeated in the

Lords, only stimulated the friends of Emancipa-

tion to take a bolder step. The hour to strike the

decisive blow had come, and it brought with it the

man.

In 1828, Mr. Fitzgerald, the member for

Clare, received a place in the Cabinet, thus

vacating his seat in the Commons. He was a

candidate for reelection. The Catholic Associa-

tion requested Mr. O'Connell to become a candi-

date for the vacancy, and in his own person seek

to establish the right of Catholics to sit in Par-

liament. He immediately issued an address to

the electors of Clare, in which, among other

things, he said: "Follow-Countrymen, your coun-

try wants a representative. I respectfully solicit

your suffrages, to raise me to that station. . . .

You will be told I am not qualified to be elected.

The assertion is untrue. I am qualified to be

elected, and to be your representative. It is true

that, as a Catholic, I cannot, and of course never

will, take the oath as prescribed to members

of Parliament. But the authority which

created those oaths can abrogate them. And I en-

tertain a confident hope that, if you elect me, the

most bigoted of our enemies will see the necessity

of removing from the chosen representative of

the people an obstacle which would prevent him

from doing his duty to his King and to his coun-

try." He gave a summary of the wrongs of Ire-

land, and concluded with a thrilling appeal to his

countrymen.

The address fell like a thunderbolt upon the

enemies of Emancipation. The friends of Fitz-

gerald would not believe it was the intention

of O'Connell to seriously contest the canvass. The

speedy arrival of two of his agents in Clare dis-

played their doubts. The county was in a boll of

excitement. The day of election approached.

Shiel addresses a concourse of electors. His elo-

quence inspires a wild enthusiasm in their hearts.

The time for the arrival of the great agitator

himself is fixed. An immense throng hails him

with banners, music, and shoutings. The trial

day comes, and the candidates appear before as-

sembled thousands of the electors. Fitzgerald

delivers an able speech. O'Connell rises and

pronounces a magnificent harangue, which sways

the passions of the peasantry as forests wave when

swept by the wing of the tempest. A violent

contest ensues, and at its close the high-spirited

declares that "Daniel O'Connell, Esq., in duly

elected a member of the Commons House of Par-

liament for the county of Clare."

This unexpected result carried dismay into the

councils of Downing Street, for they knew that

O'Connell was soon to appear in London and de-

mand his seat in Parliament. His fame was un-

known. His reputation had long ago penetrated

every mansion and cabin in the realm. The agi-

tation of the past five years, whose tread had

shaken Ireland from Cape Clear to the Giant's

Causeway, had ever and anon caused the walls of

St. Stephen's to tremble. And now, what seemed

so terrible in the distance, was to be brought to

its very doors. Parliament was not in session;

but it had been announced that ministers would

oppose Mr. O'Connell's entrance into the Com-

mons. The declaration drew Ireland to the

brink of civil war. The commander of the forces

conveyed to the ministry the alarming intima-

tion, that the troops were fraternizing with the

people, and that the militia could not be relied on

in the event of an outbreak. All minds not be-

trayed by bigotry felt that the great right for

which the Association had contended must be con-

ceded. The Duke of Wellington, then at the

head of the Government, saw that the hour had

come when either his prejudices or his place must

be surrendered. He decided that the former must

yield. Parliament was convened on the 5th of

March, 1829. On the first day of the session,

Mr. Peel moved that the House go into comi-

tee, "to take into consideration the civil disabil-

ities of his Majesty's Roman Catholic subjects."

ors who have become famous at the bar, or the

hustings, or on the platform, have failed to meet

the public expectation on encountering the sever-

est tests of the House of Commons.

Several years ago, I heard Mr. Shiel deliver a

speech in Parliament, and I retain a vivid impres-

sion of all that was gorgeous and beautiful in

the arts of rhetoric and oratory. I had heard

Choate, Hoffman, Everett, Prentiss, and Preston,

in that style of eloquence in which they excel;

he surpassed them all. His sentences rushed

forth with the velocity of a mountain torrent,

while in an hour and a half he rained down upon

the House a ceaseless shower of metaphors, similes,

declamations, and appeals, lighted with the bril-

liant flashes of wit, and dignified with the glitter-

ing hail of sarcasm. He belongs not to the best

school of oratory, but is master of that in which

he was trained. There is no rant or fustian in

his speeches, for they are eminently intellectual.

Though polished in the extreme, they are pure

and sparkling with real gems. His ornaments

are lavishly put on, but are never selected from

the tinsel and mock diamond mine. His defect

is, that he too much discards logic, and revels in

rhetoric. In discussing even an appropriation bill,

his figures are drawn from the annual budget

of the Chancellor of the Exchequer than from

the perennial springs of Helicon. He aims to

reach the heart, not through the reason, but the

reason and the heart through the imagination. He

is no more like Brougham or Webster, than a

brilliant figure of Mural at the head of his cav-

alry is like a steady fire from a park of artillery.

As a specimen of his oratory, I subjoin an ex-

tract from one of his speeches. In 1837, Lord

Lyndhurst declared, in the Upper House, that

the Irish were "aliens in blood and religion." Short-

ly, Mr. Shiel thus repelled the charge in the

Commons. Lord L. was a listener.

"Where was Arthur, Duke of Wellington,

when those words were uttered? Methinks he

should have started up to disclaim them.

"The battles, fierce, for which he passed?

ought to have come back upon him. He ought to

have remembered that, from the earliest achieve-

ment in which he was engaged, he was a soldier

of the faith which he has placed his right hand

in modern warfare, down to that last and surpassing

combat which he made his name imperishable—

from Assaye to Waterloo—the Irish soldiers, with

whom your arms were armed, were the insepara-

ble auxiliaries to the glory with which his unpar-

alleled successes have been crowned. Those were

the athletic arms that drove your bayonets at

Vimiera through the phalanxes that never yielded

in the shock of battle; and whose desperate

valor climbed the steep and filled the moats of Ba-

dajos, Salamanca, Albuera, Toulouse—and, last

of all, the great battle of Waterloo, where the

appeal to the gallant soldier before me, (pointing

to Sir Henry Hardinge), who bears, I know, a

generous heart in an intrepid breast—tell me, for

my name's sake, on that day when the

desperate combat was raging in the bal-

ance; while death fell in showers upon them;

when the artillery of France, levelled with the

precision of the most deadly science, played upon

them; when their legions, indited by the voice, in-

spired by the example, and urged by the leader

rushed again and again to the contest—tell me if

for an instant, when to hesitate for an instant was

to be lost, the 'aliens' blanched? And when, at

length, the moment for the last decisive move-

ment had arrived, and the contest was closing,

checked, was at last lost; when, with words

familiar but immortal, the great captain ex-

claimed, 'Up, lads, and at it!'—tell me if Catho-

lic Ireland with less heroic valor than the natives

of the island who had preceded them to the

field? The blood of England, Scotland, Ire-

land, flowed in the same stream, on the same

field. When the chill morning dawned, their dead

lay cold and stark together. In the same deep

pit their bodies were consigned to the earth, for

whose salvation our life-blood was poured out?

Though approaching the verge of good taste,

conceive of the present effect of such an out-

be proclaimed throughout all the land, unto all the

inhabitants thereof.

Yours, sincerely,

JAMES MORROW.

For the National Era.

In No. 15 of "Sketches of Modern Reformers,"

&c., &c., it is said: "All sects have been per-

secutors in their turn." I would respectfully ask

my excellent friend to point out the period in

history when Baptists were persecuting pagans.

They had the power in Rhode Island. I am not

averse to any man who has the power, and that

power which the general principles of human liberty.

I hope the brilliant author of the "Sketches" will

take occasion to make a correction here, unless

he has evidence to support his general charge.

He frequently refers to the writers of our

history, and to the great principles of human liberty.

This arises from the fact that Baptists have

not heretofore been a literary people, and

popular historians have unfortunately taken

but little pains to ascertain their true











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